


[Our Home](#)
[Your BizVoice](#)
[Our Current Issue](#)
[Your Advertising](#)
[Our Archives](#)
[Your Web Exclusives](#)
[Your Subscription](#)
[Your Contacts](#)

Published by

**IndianaChamber**

*The Voice of  
Indiana Business.®*

## BizVoice Web Exclusive



### Prisoner Re-entry Changing Lives ... One Job at a Time

*By J. David Donahue*

More than 16,000 criminal offenders will be released from Indiana prisons this year. Forty percent of released offenders return to prison within three years. For decades, the state provided former inmates with a bus ticket and a check for \$75 upon their release. Today, the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) is committed to making changes that protect the public by reducing recidivism.

Prison-to-community re-entry programs recognize that offenders have served their debt to society and must be given the chance to become productive citizens. At Gov. Mitch Daniels' request, Indiana recently was admitted to the National Governors Association's Prisoner Re-entry Policy Academy. Indiana is positioned to lead the nation in paving the "road to re-entry," and becoming a model for other states to follow.

Offender re-entry practices begin once individuals are sentenced to the IDOC. They encompass substance abuse, mental health and education issues, especially vocational instruction designed to enhance future employability.

#### On the job

Currently, the IDOC operates 30 employment programs to help instill strong work ethics and develop job skills among its offender population. Many inmates work during their incarceration in jobs relating to automotive repair, printing, food services, landscaping, construction and farming. In addition to work programs, the IDOC encourages family values through new programs such as the Fatherhood Initiative, as well as community service programs and faith-based, character-building programming.

In 2006, the IDOC launched the Plainfield Educational Re-entry Facility, which prepares offenders for release to Indianapolis and surrounding counties. This facility is the first of its kind in the nation that allows offenders to earn liberties and privileges by demonstrating responsible behavior. Offenders who prove they are ready for "real-world" responsibilities, such as securing and maintaining employment, are allowed to reside in a campus-like setting. Each receives a debit card that allows

them to purchase items sold in the facility. They have access to a shop offering donated contemporary clothing and are afforded state identification cards or drivers licenses required for employment.

Ex-offenders face numerous challenges, particularly those who have been imprisoned for a considerable length of time. Individuals incarcerated 20 years ago, for example, have never experienced using an automated teller machine, the Internet or cellular telephones. During this period of acclimation, ex-offenders also must compete for jobs while carrying the stigma of their criminal conviction.

### **Employer role**

Working with the Department of Workforce Development (DWD), the IDOC is identifying prospective employers that do not automatically reject all former offenders, but who will review their job resumes, examine their skills and offer them a chance to redeem themselves. Many former offenders recognize the value of having a job and are inclined to work hard to maintain employment and develop a career path that takes them away from their criminal history. Employers often are entitled to receive up to \$2,400 in tax credits per qualified employee as an additional incentive to hiring recently released offenders.

As a business owner or community leader, you might ask, “What’s in it for me?” Employability is one of the major factors in the future success of offenders trying to re-enter society. By keeping an open mind and realizing that offenders have paid their debt to society, it’s time for change.

With help from community, civic and business leaders, we can build a new workforce, change lives and make communities safer throughout Indiana.

**Resource: J. David Donahue is commissioner of the Indiana Department of Correction. He can be contacted at (317) 232-5715 or [www.in.gov/indcorrection](http://www.in.gov/indcorrection)**

---

[\[Back to Your Web Exclusives\]](#)

[Home](#) • [About BizVoice](#) • [Current Issue](#) • [Advertising](#) • [Archives](#) • [Your Web Exclusives](#) • [Subscribe](#) • [Contact Us](#)